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UNCLAS ABU DHABI 03583

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 003583

SIPDIS

STATE FOR IRAQ/PPD; NEA/PPD; NEA/ARP; ECA; IIP/G/NEA;  
IIP/G/IR

E.O. 12958: N/A  
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SUBJECT: Embassies Abu Dhabi and Baghdad Join Forces to Train  
Iraqi Journalists on Effective Use of the Internet, September  
25th to 30th, 2004.

REF: ABU DHABI 2895

1. Summary: Embassy Abu Dhabi's Public Affairs Section combined forces with Embassy Baghdad to host 10 Iraqi journalists, (8 men & 2 women) in a workshop entitled Effective Use of the Internet for Journalists, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, September 25th to 30th, 2004. Embassy Baghdad Public Affairs Section selected journalists from Baghdad, Basra, Hilla, Mosul, and Kirkuk, all of whom were senior editors, writers, and television producers. Information Resource Center Director, and former Fulbrighter, Helmi Noman and Information Resource Officer Henry Mendelsohn led the workshop. It focused on effective use of the Internet and covered topics such as smarter surfing, how to find USG information, evaluating web sites, legal and copyright issues, and blogging. By the end of the workshop each participant had self-published on the 'net. The participants visited several UAE media organizations and made many local contacts.

Digital Video Conferences Showcase Technology and Bring Officials Into the Classroom:

2. In addition to the skills training the workshop included two Digital Video Conferences. The first featured Deputy Spokesperson Adam Ereli who spoke in Arabic about responsible reporting, and gave an on the record interview. In the second, Mofid Deak, a senior Bureau of International Information Programs writer/editor, spoke in Arabic about how the State Department publishes electronically official policy texts and speeches, and works to ensure accuracy and authority.

Networking Benefits Local Media as well as Iraqi Participants

13. The Iraqis also met with major media organizations in Abu Dhabi and Dubai including the Emirates News Agency, the official news agency of the UAE, Al Ittihad newspaper, Al Arabiya TV, Dubai TV, and the Dubai Press Club. They met with section heads who explained how media organizations operate and establish editorial policies, and also discussed operational issues. This gave them an opportunity to network with UAE based news directors who asked the Iraqis if they were willing to report stories from Iraq in order to improve reporting because often non-Iraqi reporters are unable to gain access to dangerous locations.

Both sides discussed the need for balanced reporting and the Iraqis were quick to point out that much of the reporting done in Iraq by Arab media organizations was biased and did not reflect ground realities, nor the progress that was being accomplished in Iraq by both coalition forces and the Iraqi government. They provided many specific examples of inaccurate reporting by Arab media organizations.

#### Small Focused Programs Yield Many Results

14. Result: Al Arabiya offered to host the Iraqis for free internships in the future.

15. Result: The Dubai Press Club, the most developed press club in the Middle East, invited the Iraqis to become members and welcomed them to use the press club on return visits. Membership in the press club also entitles them to use constituent press clubs including the National Press Club in Washington.

16. Result: Press Placement: The program was extensively covered in the UAE press with coverage appearing in Arabic dailies Al Ittihad, (cir.: 85,000) Al Bayan, (cir.: 40,000) and Akhbar al Arab, (cir.: 20,000.) The participants published stories in Iraq upon their return.

17. Result: Blogging: One participant developed his own blog web site upon returning to Iraq, <http://alaaghazala.blogs.com/>.

#### Heartfelt Gratitude

18. The same participant emailed U.S. Ambassador to the UAE Michele J. Sison to say: "Dear Ambassador: It is my great honor to present my deepest regards to you, and to the UAE Embassy staff, for your generous and kindness for us during the training course on Internet last week. It was a wonderful opportunity to me and to other Iraqi journalists to take the lessons and then visit media institutions in Abu-Dhabi and Dubai. This experience was very useful to me in opening new horizons. May God keep you safe! . Hope to see you again one day. Ala'a K. Ghazala, Iraqi Journalist, Babil."

19. Another participant emailed to say: "Dear Helmi: Thank you very much indeed for everything you have done for us. Your patience & knowledge will be kept deeply in our mind and thoughts. We are back home safe. I'll keep in contact. Please convey my regards for everybody. Regards, Adil Hameed."

#### Integrating Iraqi Journalists into the Larger Middle East

110. Conclusion: Post believes small, focused, cost-effective programs like this help to integrate Iraqi journalists into the larger Middle East, and that bringing them to the UAE is particularly important because it demonstrates a Middle East country that works, has a mobile and international corps of Arabic and English-speaking journalists, and has successfully developed a vibrant and relatively open press.

The importance of this type of training cannot be over stated. Information and communications literacy training empowers those who receive it and the less access the participants have to state of the art training the more they appreciate it. Internet accessibility in Iraq is neither widespread nor affordable for most. State of the art training for specific user groups on how to use Internet effectively in Arabic is even more rare. Such training generates an enormous amount of good will and establishes partnerships with participants and employers of the participants. Post thanks Embassy Baghdad and Iraq Public

Diplomacy for enabling a successful program. .

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